HOW TO PLAY LIKE...

TOM MORELLO

BY VINCENT DEMASI

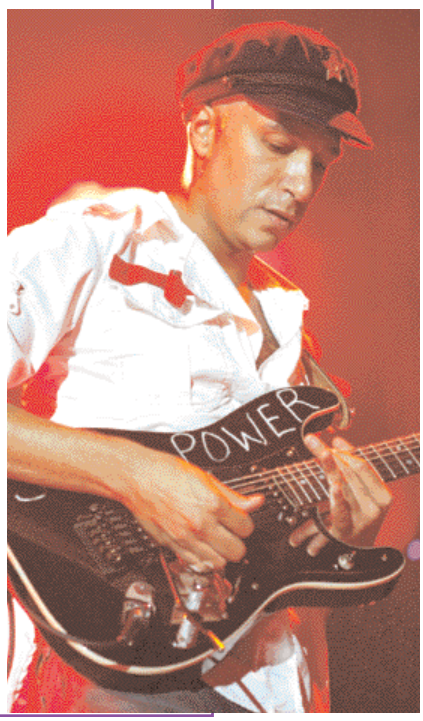
If post-grunge heavy guitar were to choose a patron saint, the most righteous nominee for canonization would likely be Rage Against the Machine's Tom Morello. Morello (now with the band Audioslave) wore his guitars unfashionably high and often dressed more like a tennis instructor than a rock star, but he delivered some of the most insurgent and inspired fretboard heroics this side of Edward Van Halen. Infusing his potent blend of sludgy Sabbath riffage with Hendrix-y psychedelics and funky sixteenth-note scratch work à la Jimmy Nolen—all with an underlying hip hop aesthetic—the Libertyville, Illinois, native forged one of the most innovative and vital guitar styles of the past 15 years.

The slow-grooved sonic assault in Ex. 1 is typical of Morello's lines on Rage's anthemic rockers "Killing in the Name" and "Revolver." Played in dropped-D tuning (D, A, D, G, B, E, low to high), it incorporates octave shapes, one-finger power chords, blues scale chromatics, and a tasty D7♯9 stab at the end.

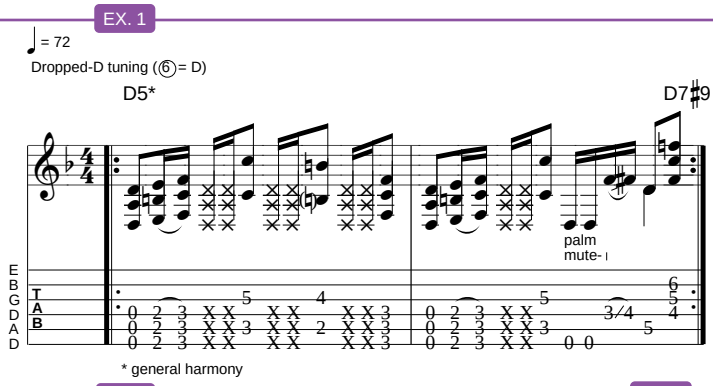
After a bludgeoning main riff, Morello often likes to downshift to sparser textures during a song's verse. Play Ex. 2's syncopated single-note line with a tight palm-mute to cop the driving funk feel reminiscent of "Guerilla Radio." For added vibe try rocking a wah pedal back and forth rhythmically in an eighth-note pattern.

Another cool Morello stunt involves mimicking a DJ's turntable scratch noises by using a pick or slide to scrape and tap the strings and then processing the resulting sounds through a Digitech Whammy pedal. Even if you don't have a Whammy, Ex. 3 illustrates how to nail a similar effect by tapping the side of your pick on the 12th fret of the B and G strings with a rapid-fire staccato attack, then sliding it up three frets in regular rhythmic intervals. (If you've got a Whammy, set the pitch-shift function to go up a minor third instead of sliding your pick.)

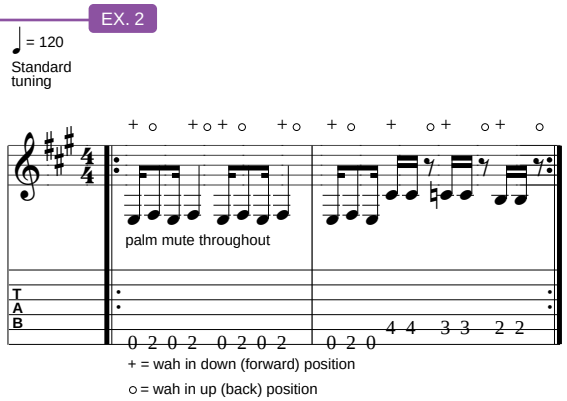
Ex. 4, inspired by the classic riffs from "Bombtrack," "Bulls on Parade," and "Down Rodeo," shows Morello's penchant for octave jumps. Also dig how the half-step bend in beat four of the first bar implies an *F♯7sus4*—a millisecond of tension that resolves back to F♯7. Heavy but tasty!



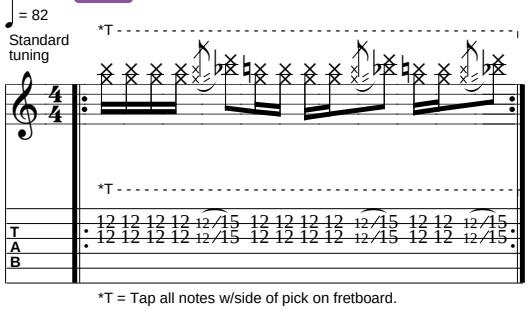
EX. 1



EX. 2



EX. 3



EX. 4

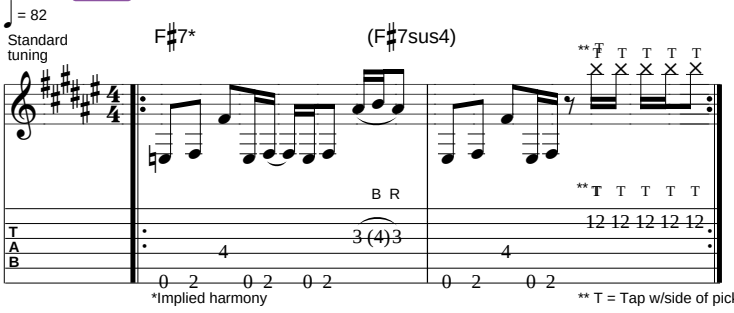
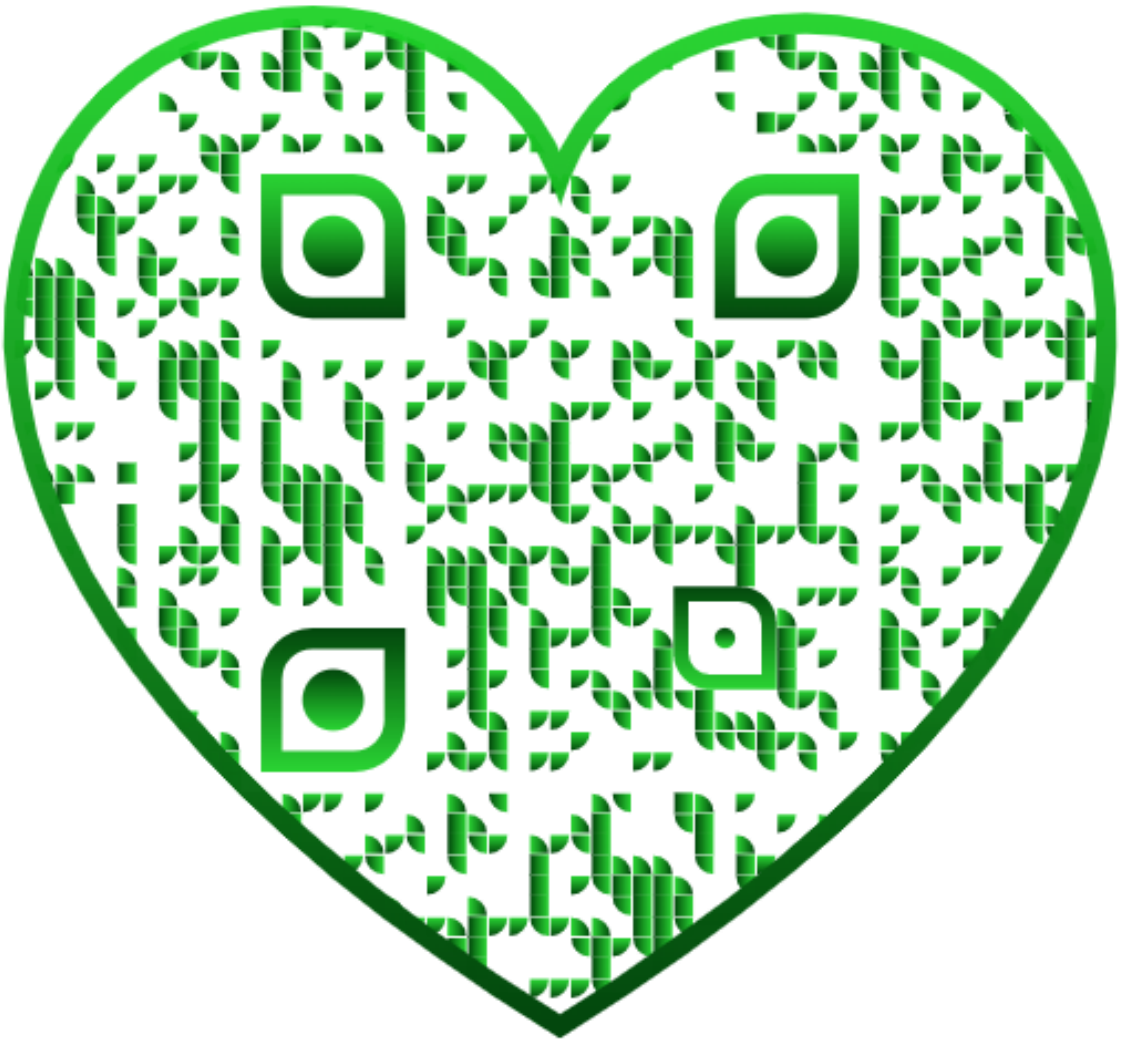



PHOTO: JOHN SHEARER/WIREIMAGE